

Public Market Tour Briefing

(Olympia's Farmers Market, Pike Place Market, and Bellingham's Depot Market)

On June 17th-19th city council members Jim Bailey and Karen Rutherford, along with city staff members Allison Williams, Steve King, and Pete Lolos had the opportunity to tour several Farmers/Public Markets located on the West Side of Washington State. The purpose of the tours was to evaluate the operations, management, and formation of three of Washington State's leading farmers markets. The information gathered from the tours is intended to aid council members and staff in their upcoming decisions regarding the feasibility and future of the Pybus Public Market project.

Prior to departing on the market tour, Pete Lolos provided staff and council members with an itinerary outlining the intents of visiting each market, along with a detailed schedule including whom they would be meeting with (itinerary is attached).

Intents of Market Tour Locations:

Olympia's Farmer's Market – The intent of visiting the Olympia's Farmers Market was to understand the unique relationship of an agreement between a Port District, a City, and a Private Party. Our current situation will significantly benefit from understanding a very similar situation that Olympia went through several years ago in the development of their farmers market. We had an opportunity to ask about the process involved when working through a planning agreement, and the interests each party had and tried to protect within the agreement. We also tried to highlight what each party would suggest to ease the process and what each party would have done had they known what they know now.

Pike's Place Market- The intent of visiting the Pike's Place market was to focus on the aspects of a permanent public market. There is a significant difference in the operations and structure involved in a public market compared to a farmers market. We had an opportunity to discuss how the market manager coordinates events, vendors, and relations with a Public Development Authority. Because Pike's Place is conducted on such a large scale, it is important to understand where a market like this relates to our project. The main areas include service to vendor ratios, revenue to visitor ratios, and aspects involving vendor retention, relations, and expectations.

Bellingham Depot Market- The intent of visiting the Bellingham's Depot Market was to primarily understand the pros/cons of a weekend farmers market with a stable location (compared to Olympia's 4 day 10 month market). Secondly, Bellingham provided a great opportunity to understand the impact a farmers market has on the community, especially in terms of its relationship to development and sense of community. Having the ability to meet with Members of the Chrysalis Hotel and Anthony's Restaurant helped us to understand their thought process in relation to projects such as the Pybus Public Market. For example, what does it take for companies like theirs to develop in an area? And, is a Market setting a helpful catalyst?

Conclusion of Market Tours:

In an effort to consolidate the major themes and finding of the market tour, the following section will outline consistent observations witnessed during the tour.

Organization Rules and Guidelines:

In the overall operation of the markets, documented rules and guidelines have helped ensure compliance and consistency. The documentation of processes, procedures, rules, and guidelines lets market vendors understand how they integrate into the market as a whole. Everything from how seniority is determined, when fees are due, how vendors will be added / dismissed, and how products/produce will be displayed is important to outline. To ensure quality, consistency, and locality of products, the farmers markets we visited included restrictions from where products are produced. In Olympia there is a 4 county area that is allowed to participate in the market, in Bellingham there was a 2 county area. The distance restrictions also provide market managers with the ability to inspect every vendor for quality and compliance with guidelines. There are some exceptions to the distance restrictions; a limited number of vendors that produce products not available in the immediate area, but are still produced within the general region are allowed into the market. An example of such products is cherries from Eastern Washington which are often allowed into the market when Western Washington vendors are not able to meet market demand. A great organization rules and guidelines document example and model to emulate is Olympia's Green Book (attached).

Operations:

Having a strong market manager and staff was a consistent theme at all of the markets. Charley Haney (Olympia), James Haydu (Pike Place), and Caprice Teske (Bellingham) are those key managers that ensure the day to day operations of the markets and compliance with organization rules and guidelines. Having to deal with tenant conflicts and every day management issues is a responsibility that requires unique talents; it became clearer during our tour that the management responsibility is not something the city should involve itself in. Professional management was a strong recommendation, someone who understands both the farmers and just as importantly business management.

While the market manager is responsible for day to day operations, they are not alone in the overall operation of the market. All three markets had a board of directors which generally consisted of farmers, friends of the market, and local business individuals. Having a board of directors contributed to the markets' ability to raise funds, create a management and growth strategy, and recruit supporters. Each market also involved a jury evaluation process. This process vetted each vendor on pre-determined market standards to ensure a consistency of quality products within the market.

It was highly recommended that our group begin to look at the formation of a steering committee, consisting of representatives from the farmers market, community farm connection, local area businesses, architects, lawyers, and other interested parties with specific areas of expertise within their field who can aid in development of our market; these individuals may even become the first board of directors for the market.

Ownership and Leadership from the Community:

Community leadership played an integral part in the formation of each of the markets visited and continues within the organization structure of the markets. At both the Olympia Market and Bellingham Market, there was an opportunity to meet with some of those strong leaders within the community. At Bellingham, we met with Brian Griffin, a retired businessman, market activist, and Rotarian. Mr. Griffin stressed the importance of allowing the community to take ownership of the project. In the Bellingham Market, contribution from the Rotary, and a Brick Program that sold engraved pavers for the project not only helped raise money, but also allowed for the community to buy into the project.

Strong community leadership in Bellingham was also displayed through Mike Finger of Cedar Valley Farms. Mr. Finger, a farmer and key individual in the formation of the Depot Market Square, indicated the importance of involving the farmers in process and design decisions. Ultimately, the tenants of the site are the farmers and their input should not be minimized in the process. To ensure the involvement of the community and farmers it was recommended to start thinking about fundraising opportunities. If the community has an opportunity to buy into and contribute to the project before it is complete, it will help build hype and promote the market for when it is complete.

While the markets we visited demonstrated strong community ownership, which was evident through the City's, Port's, and private contributions into the markets, it was really the vendors who were responsible for the operations. Market vendors formed their own market organizations, they worked together to pay their equitable share in lease payments, manager salaries, marketing expenses, and market maintenance. Organizations such as the Friends of the Market, generally consisting of community business members, worked to raise additional funds for the market and they also sponsored special events and projects that the market may not have otherwise been able to afford.

Community Service / Food Banks:

Food bank collections and distributions became natural connections for the farmers markets. All of the markets we visited incorporated community service and food banks within their daily operations. Some examples included having a drop off for food, vendors donating extra produce and prepared food, and patron's ability to purchase food at a reduced price for the vendor to retain for food bank donations. Each facility either had a place to store food bank donations or they facilitated pick up stations for food banks to come after their markets were closed for the day. The markets also put on local food drives for the holidays and/or for area low income schools when in need.

In addition to supplying food to area food banks both Bellingham's Market and Olympia's Market had a connection to some Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) program. Because modern "food stamps" are located on cards similar to a credit card, accepting the benefits requires certain card scanners. To ensure that their markets met the needs of EBT participants, Bellingham and Olympia markets had at least one EBT terminal available. EBT Participants are able to use their cards at these terminals to convert their benefits to wooden nickels. The one dollar denominated wooden coins then could be used throughout the market on certain allowable goods. Some individual vendors even had the capability to directly accept EBT cards. There are costs for a Market to participate in an EBT Program, including the purchase or lease of EBT terminals, the time spent with accounting, and expense associated with ensuring that the EBT Program is being

administered properly. While the systems can be costly, these programs also provide for a substantial portion of the markets recorded business and they also serve a great benefit to the community.

Extended Use:

Because of the general design and location of the farmers markets we visited, there existed an opportunity for extended use beyond farmers markets. Bellingham uses their site on non-market days for downtown parking; also a building on site can be rented out for private events. Caprice Teske (Market Manager) indicated that they underutilize their space and they are planning to spend more time marketing and promoting their space for uses, including weddings, auctions, and community events, for non market days. Olympia's manager Charlie Haney indicated that their space could also be rented out and used on non-market days and after market hours and it has become a popular venue for many events throughout the year.

Allowing the market venue to be utilized to its highest use involves looking at the space beyond just a farmers/public market. Allowing compatibility with other uses will help relieve the dependency on ensuring operations revenues on one source and allows for increased interest in the development as a whole.

Parking:

Integrated into the city's downtown and commercial areas, each of the markets made comments regarding the constraints they have for parking. Charlie Haney, market manager of Olympia's Market, indicated that parking was an issue not only for those visiting the market, but also for her vendors. Because of their parking constraints, she requires her vendors to park in lots located away from the market. Charlie mentioned that vendor parking should be a higher priority than it currently is, and that if they could go back and work it into their parking plan/structure she would. Parking not only provides convenience for visitors, it can also help facilitate circulation within the market site. However, despite the complaints and constraints regarding parking, market managers indicated that parking has probably not significantly negatively impacted the success of their markets. Parking appeared to be more of a management issue due to time spent on complaints more than an impact on business.

Parking at Olympia's market is a shared lot for Anthony's Restaurant, an Office Building, and the Farmers Market. An Anthony's employee monitors the parking lot and enforces the two hour time limit that collectively was agreed upon by the 3 parties involved in the parking lot. The parking lot monitor has the ability to issue tickets to those that violate the 2 hour parking lot limitations. Because the parking lot is not located near downtown, the Olympia site rarely competes with other businesses for parking, but on busy days market attendants sometimes cannot find parking in the lot and have to park several blocks away. Parking within the market area is generally paid metered parking.

Parking at the Bellingham Depot Market is more reliant on the availability of downtown parking. There is no dedicated lot available for just the farmers market and because the farmers market is located downtown patrons often compete with area businesses for parking. While those that frequent the market know that parking is readily available, visitors may have a more difficult time locating parking within a desired proximity of the market.



Yellow areas of the picture above shows the dedicated parking for Olympia's Market, an adjoining office building and an Anthony's Restaurant. There are approximately 340 parking spaces included in this area. The Blue area outlines the Farmers Market. Produce and craft vendors are located within the large center building and the smaller buildings located a little farther up on the photo are the prepared food vendors and a center stage with covered seating area.



The green and red areas highlight the location of the Bellingham Farmers Market. The red area acts as a paid parking lot during non-market days and the structures located in this area are designed as covered parking spots, yet on market days these structures serve as covered vendor stalls. The green area is the main market building dedicated to vendor stalls, market offices, and space available for rent on non-market days.

Design:

To best way to describe what was discussed about design is to highlight some of the key words: Light, Open-Air, Circulation, Shade/Cover, Seating, and Bustling. Design will help foster the environment in which you wish to create at the market. Tradition of a farmers market provides for the feeling of being connected to the earth, by capturing the natural setting and allowing the market to remain light and open-aired will help maintain the traditional aspects of a farmers market. However, establishing the location as place that feels permanent involves elements such as lighting, shade, and seating. And finally, in creating an environment for the vendors' success and increased sales involves facilitating circulation while maintaining the bustling generally enjoyed by market visitors.

To aid in the development of both an aesthetic and functional design, input needs to be received by those both attending the markets and those vendors at the market. We also need to consult those such as Bellingham, who indicated that they would probably re-layout their site, based off of what they know now in terms of circulation. Design should take the time to get the input of community members, vendors, and experienced market managers. See below for pictures of the Bellingham and Olympia Markets.

Included in the design of the building are the location, size, and convenience of bathrooms. The restrooms cannot only help make the market feel more hygienic, but actual be more hygienic. The restrooms at both the Bellingham and Olympia farmers markets were located in one central location. Each restroom had about 6 male and 6 female stalls. The restrooms were located directly on site and were permanent structures, not port o' potties. Beyond being convenient for market patrons, the Bellingham market ensured that their restrooms were low maintenance and convenient for market staff by designing those to be easily cleaned by being able to spray down the whole restroom. Providing restrooms on site will make the market convenient for patrons and prolong their time at the market. Costs of restroom maintenance and cleaning can be expensive, so designs need to consider how to minimize maintenance while maintaining a facility that market vendors feel comfortable using.



The pictures above are from the Bellingham Depot Market. The market is located on Railroad Ave and the specific lot at one time was the site of a train depot. To highlight on the history of the location, the market took on the name Depot Market Square and aesthetically the market theme resembles a train depot station. In the pictures we can see steel beams that came from a local train bridge that was being dismantled during the time the market was being constructed that aid in the depot station theme. The stalls that are used as permanent parking during non-market days and serve as functional vendor space during market days. The permanent covering for the vendors provides for a uniformity among vendors and stream line look that generally isn't available from the traditional tent structure associated with a farmers market.



The above pictures depict the Olympia Farmers Market. The top left picture depicts the farmers market on a non-market day. The building has the ability to be completely closed up for non-market days, helping to preserve the building and space for the Thursday-Sunday market and for events for which the space can be rented. The next two photos show the market on a market day. The left photo is an exterior view where we can see various vendors and seating which is available for market patrons. The right photo shows a stage and seating that is generally full on market days. More recently the seating around the stage has received a permanent coving. The third photo on the left shows the market during a taste of the market event. Indoor space normally housing market vendors is transformed into a seating area for patrons ready to enjoy a taste of the market event. The next two photos show the standards and dedication the market has on ensuring quality, not only in the products but in the display of those products. Olympia's market puts on training classes for their vendors to understand how to better display their products. The uniformity between vendors helps make the market feel very organized, high quality, and professional. The final picture on the lower right shows a prepared food vendor stand located on the perimeter of the market property. The buildings that house the 7-8 prepared food vendors are permanent structures which provide convenience and stability for prepared food vendors. These vendors are only open during market days and are a major contributor to gross market sales. The prepared vendor buildings are all located close together and seating for prepared food vendor customers is provided throughout the market.

Market Mix:

At each of the markets we visited it became very clear that the market mix played an important role in the success of the markets. The managers of the markets are careful to keep a balance of tenants both to ensure the profitability of their vendors and the success of the market as a whole. At Bellingham and Olympia it was clear that as a farmers market the farmers were the highest priority within the market mix, however the farmer is generally not the vendor type that brings in the most money for the market. At all of the markets the highest grossing vendors are prepared food vendors, without whom the market would suffer.

The market mix generally provides for increased quality and uniqueness within the market. To aid in the selection of market vendors the market manager works closely with a jury consisting of existing vendors and more impartial members of a review board. Because the board has pre-determined standards they review that the potential vendors meet their existing standards and that they also are unique from what the market already has for a vendor base. It is important that the market not have too many of any one type of vendor. Despite prepared food vendors being one of the markets largest gross contributors, both Olympia and Bellingham said that at their markets present size they most likely would not add any more prepared food vendors. Both Olympia and Bellingham currently have 6-7 prepared food vendors and at the current time that appears to be the optimum in terms of contributing the market's overall mix.

Growth:

Managing growth becomes a delicate balance for farmers/public markets. All of the markets we visited expressed interest in being able to expand. However, growth in the markets we visited has been something that was very organic. Markets were allowed to start where they were and grow as opportunity came along; the comment was made that the market should be allowed to grow into itself. To help manage the growth, managers set expectations for the year to year growth and they made strategic decisions involving vendor addition and mix in order to help manage the organic growth of the market.

Both the Bellingham Depot Market Square and Olympia's Farmer's Market nearly doubled in size (# of vendors and sales) upon the development of a dedicated permanent location for their operations. The markets also had an impact on the growth of business around their establishments. In Bellingham we had an opportunity to walk down and tour Railroad Ave, which local members say has really been transformed from a seedy unsafe area to a vibrant business hub, with many coffee shops, restaurants, and boutiques. It was clear that the Bellingham farmers market provided a lot of foot traffic to the area businesses. In Olympia, many businesses sprouted up around the farmers market. There are now 8 restaurants, several office buildings, and many small boutiques.

Promotion / Marketing:

To help maintain interest and consumer draw to the markets, each focused on providing entertainment and events to help promote the market. Each facility had musicians and scheduled events throughout their market season. Events that appeared popular were Chili Cook Offs and various fruit festivals. Because the market locations became such a hit within their community and well known locally, market managers from Bellingham and Olympia indicated that they would rather spend their advertising dollars on attracting tourists to the location. Pike's Place was unique in that they get national and world exposure anytime that an article is written on Seattle, and they believed their marketing dollars are better spent locally promoting special events.

The recognition within the community also provided for the farmers market spaces to be popular venues for other events and gatherings. Both in Olympia and Bellingham, the market space can be rented by community members. The markets also organize some events of their own and even provide a space for local musicians to play during market hours. To regulate the entertainment, the "buskers" must apply for and receive a permit for the day. At Bellingham's market, approved musicians wear an identifying pass, which gives them permission to perform on market property during market hours.

Olympia and Bellingham market managers believe that their markets are successful because of consistent local clientele. The markets are a magnet for a diverse group of people, including diversity in age, ethnicity, and incomes. The markets strive to provide something for everyone. At Bellingham's farmers market an attraction for children was available in a specified area of the market; hula hoops were available for the children to use. In Olympia, balloon makers, clowns and other performers were present and obviously provided for child entertainment. We also witnessed a local senior living facility group that brought their members and staff to the Bellingham market to do some weekend shopping. The farmers markets became an all day activity for locals and not just a place to do grocery shopping; it is a location to entertain yourself and your children, meet friends, and accomplish some weekly shopping.

Recommendations for Continued Action:

Based off of the information gathered during the market tours we are recommending the following continued action in the development of the Pybus Project.

1. Meet with and gain an understanding of the current leadership potential of CFC and the Wenatchee Valley Farmers Market
2. Develop a steering committee to address the community interest in the project. This committee should be similar to a board of directors. Members should have an expertise and knowledge of community projects, business, and farmers. This committee can begin to work on getting community buy in through fund raising and input regarding design, future operations, and management.
3. Tangential processes: Determine City role; Formalize organization/structure for market management and engage community fundraising for year one; and Finalize design, property planning with input of all partners